

## Who Were the Sadducees?

The Sadducees and the Pharisees were the two primary religious parties existing among the Jews at the time of Jesus. These two parties were opposed to each other, similar to Democrats and Republicans holding different points of view. At the time of Christ, there were about 5,000 Sadducees in Israel.

The Sadducees were *aristocratic* and were composed of the upper class and wealthy. The Roman historian Josephus writes, "They only gain the well-to-do; they have not the people on their side ... and have the confidence of the wealthy alone" (*Antiquities*. xiii, 10, 6). Caiaphas, the high priest at the time of Christ, was a Sadducee. Their influence was restricted for the most part to Jerusalem. The high-priests belonged to the party of the Sadducees, who controlled the Temple and its rituals. In contrast, the Pharisees controlled the synagogues throughout Israel. The Pharisees considered the Sadducees to be sinners of the worst kind.

The Sadducees pursued policies designed to appease the governing authorities of Rome. They were primarily concerned with keeping peace in the nation and thereby avoiding trouble with the Romans. Any popular movement was a potential threat to the Sadducees, especially anything that would be regarded as an uprising. The chief priests said of Jesus: "If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation" (John 11:48).

In the administration of justice, the Sadducees were exceptionally strict in matters of law and order. Josephus refers to the Sadducees as "more heartless" (or "savage") than any of the other Jews when they sit in judgment (*Antiquities*, xx, 9.1). He adds that the Pharisees were "naturally lenient in the matter of punishments." Josephus left the Sadducees to become a Pharisee. He indicates that the Sadducees were responsible for the death of James, the half-brother of Jesus (*Antiquities* xx 9.1; Acts 12:1-2).

Sadducees did not believe in angels, demons, the resurrection of the body, or an afterlife with punishment or rewards (See Acts 23:8). They believed the soul perished with the body. Even though they were enemies of each other, they would sometimes join forces in an attempt to trap Jesus (Matt. 16:1). Jesus warned the disciples to "beware of the leaven (false teachings) of the Pharisees and the Sadducees" (Matt. 16:6,12). The Sadducees and Pharisees had a sharp disagreement on the topic of resurrection. When the apostle Paul was on trial before the Sanhedrin, he was able to get the Pharisees and Sadducees into an intramural battle over the resurrection (Acts 23:1-10). With the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., the Sadducees disappeared from history.

### Comparing Sadducees and Pharisees

<b>Sadducees</b>	<b>Pharisees</b>
The high priests came from the Sadducees.	The scribes and lawyers came from the Pharisees
Controlled the Temple and its rituals	Controlled activities in the synagogues
Composed of upper class and wealthy	Composed of common people
Concerned with politics	Concerned with religion
Cooperated with Roman rule	Opposed Roman rule
Rejected the Oral Law	Followed the Oral Law
Were against the Pharisees adding "fence laws" around the Torah	Added regulations to build a "fence" around the Torah to keep people from transgressing
Did not believe in the resurrection or afterlife	Did believe in the resurrection and afterlife
Did not believe in angels or demons	Did believe in angels and demons
Did not believe in a coming Messiah	Did believe in a coming Messiah
Disregarded the Pharisaic traditions and decrees for what was clean and unclean	Created traditions and decrees for what was clean and unclean
Believed man's choice of good or evil depended on his own free will. They rejected the thought of divine intervention.	Believed in the cooperation of the human with the divine and in preordination.